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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Senate of the State of Illinois learned with regret of the death of John H. Johnson of Chicago on Monday, August 8, 2005; and

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WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson was the founder of Ebony magazine, which was the cornerstone of Johnson Publishing Co., a privately held publishing, cosmetics, television production, and fashion firm based in Chicago; it became one of the nation's largest black-owned businesses, and the owner came to be considered one of the nation's most influential and honored African-American businessmen; for 60 straight years, Ebony has been the biggest African-American owned magazine in the world; and

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WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson lived a life that was more inspirational than any of the cover stories in Ebony or Jet, his other major magazine; a modest beginning proved to be no obstacle, and his life was filled with achievements and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996; he was the first publisher to persuade the business community of the vast purchasing power of the African-American market; he was named by Forbes magazine as one of the 400 richest people in America; and

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WHEREAS, He was born in Arkansas City, Arkansas, on January 19, 1918, to Gertrude and Leroy Johnson; he moved to Chicago with his widowed mother in 1933 and was reared by his mother and stepfather, James Williams; he attended Wendell Phillips High School and DuSable High School, graduating in 1936; he was editor of the DuSable newspaper and the yearbook and was class president; he went on to work part-time as an office worker at the black-owned Supreme Life Insurance Co.; at Supreme Life, he culled newspapers and magazines to prepare a digest of events in the black community for Harry Pace, Supreme Life's

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1 president; by 1942, he had the idea of condensing such articles
2 into a monthly magazine, a black version of Reader's Digest to
3 be called Negro Digest (and later Black World before it was
4 discontinued in 1976); and

5 WHEREAS, With a loan of \$500, using his mother's furniture
6 as collateral, Mr. Johnson mailed a charter subscription offer
7 for the magazine to Supreme Life customers; with 3,000 people
8 responding and each sending \$2, he had funds for the first
9 issue of Negro Digest, which he published with the aid of his
10 wife, Eunice, whom he had married in 1941; within a year, Negro
11 Digest was selling 50,000 copies a month; and

12 WHEREAS, His breakthrough came in November of 1945, with
13 the first issue of Ebony, a slick-paper magazine modeled after
14 Life magazine; paid circulation of Ebony was about 1.7 million
15 in 2004, and his publishing activities expanded to include Jet,
16 with circulation now at 927,402, and Ebony Jr., as well as to
17 include books; and

18 WHEREAS, Four years after it was founded, Jet caused a
19 sensation when in September 1955 it published an open-coffin
20 picture of Emmett Till; the boy's death and the picture of his
21 mutilated face galvanized the civil rights movement; and

22 WHEREAS, In 1973 he established Fashion Fair Cosmetics, a
23 line of beauty aids and a sponsor of a large touring fashion
24 show; he formerly owned three radio stations, and he was the
25 first African-American businessman to have his own building on
26 Michigan Avenue; and

27 WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson served on numerous advisory
28 commissions on the local, State and federal levels; he served
29 on the boards of some major corporations and educational,
30 cultural, and philanthropic organizations; he attended the
31 University of Chicago and Northwestern University, and was

1 later awarded 31 honorary doctoral degrees and many honors for
2 his business and humanitarian activities; he gave generously to
3 many causes, including \$4 million to Howard University in
4 Washington, which named its communications school after him;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson, who retained the titles of chairman
7 and publisher until his death, made Johnson Publishing a family
8 business; his mother, Gertrude, was a vice president of the
9 firm until her death in 1977, his wife is secretary-treasurer,
10 and his daughter, Linda, held several positions before she
11 became CEO; and

12 WHEREAS, The passing of John H. Johnson has been deeply
13 felt by many, especially his wife, Eunice; his daughter, Linda
14 Johnson Rice; and his granddaughter, Alexa; therefore, be it

15 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-FOURTH GENERAL
16 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
17 CONCURRING HEREIN, that we mourn the passing of John H.
18 Johnson, a man who truly rose from a life of poverty to live
19 the American dream and became an African-American business
20 icon, and we extend our sincerest condolences to his family,
21 friends, and all who knew and loved him; and be it further

22 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
23 presented to his family as an expression of our deepest
24 sympathy and sorrow for this great loss.